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God's Shalom is Here
Ephesians 2:10-22
September 4, 2016, Jeff Germs

I want to begin this morning by reading a couple paragraphs from a wonderful little book called *God's Shalom Project*, by Bernhard Ott.¹

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Dr. Ott is a theology professor at a seminary in Switzerland.

In the opening chapter of the book he writes:

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“God has a project. God invites us to be co-workers in this project. That is why I am a Christian...and an enthusiastic one at that! How regrettable when being a Christian is portrayed as something boring, something disengaged from the real world, or mere theory. If the God of the Bible has invited humans to participate in God's great plan for the universe, then God is certainly not interested in merely teaching humans boring theology.

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Unfortunately there are lots of people who call themselves Christian, who speak of a personal relationship with Jesus, but have only a vague idea of what God's plans and goals are. Many have come to Christ because they have been concerned about the salvation of their souls. They have experienced conversion, and that's enough to give them security about their eternal destiny.

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And yet many of them have almost no clue about what God's great project is, nor how, since the creation of the earth, humans have been drawn into the fulfillment of God's plan. Nor do they understand how God deals with humans as they are drawn into the project of fulfilling God's plan.

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Sometimes it is the reverse... People are fascinated by the teaching of Jesus (for example the Sermon on the Mount) and with great passion set out to change the world. But with the passing of time, their energies drain away and they give up their goals with resignation. What is missing is a personal relationship with Jesus. Have these people understood any better than the others what God's plans and purposes for humanity really are?”

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So, what is God's plan? What is he up to? And what does it have to do with you and me?

Before we look at our passage let me tell you three truths about what God is up to.

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1. God is building for himself a people fully committed to what he is about.

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2. God's plan for his people is that they would be at peace with him and with each other.

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¹ Bernhard Ott, *God's Shalom Project*, Good Books. Intercourse, PA ©2004. pgs. 5-6

3. God is making a people who are to be bearers of his peace.

Now, the word, 'peace' in Hebrew is, as most of you know, '*shalom*.'

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But there is more to *shalom* than what our English word peace conveys.

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The Hebrew word '*shalom*' comes from the word '*shillem*', which means "to pay." So, you could say that every time you make a payment on your mortgage peace is made. There is a reconciliation that takes place every time that transaction happens.

Peace is not fully made, of course, until the mortgage is completely paid off, but the requirement for temporary peace has been met when you make each payment.

Usually when we think of the word *shalom* we think that it is simply a greeting wishing the other person peace, or prosperity. It does include that, but there is much more to it than just well wishing. When a Hebrew person greets another person with the word '*shalom*' what they are saying is; "**Is there *Shalom*, or are there still debts between us?**" Or, "**Are you happy to see me, or do I still owe you something?**"²

If there is still indebtedness there is not yet *shalom*, and there needs to be a reconciliation before peace can take place. We all know that monetary debts are not the only ways that we can be indebted. As fallen human beings we have a propensity to cause pain and injustice to others whether it is knowingly or accidental. When we do this peace is lost.

If Ruthie and I have a disagreement and are in conflict with one another and are having a hard time coming to a resolution, one of us might say something like, "*Are we ok? Is everything good between us?*" In other words, "*Is there shalom between us, or do I still owe you something?*"

Let me illustrate this further. On a guitar there are six strings. Each of them is tuned so when played in combination with each other as you position your fingers at certain points on the fret board there is harmony between the strings. And if played well it will make beautiful music. If any of the strings are out of tune, however, there is dissonance. Even if you are not musical you know when you hear a guitar that's played out of tune that there is something not quite right. What is actually happening is that there are two or more notes at odds with each other and they are fighting it out. One of them might be true to pitch and the other one needs to come in line with the true note if there is to be harmony. Otherwise there is no *shalom*. There needs to be a reconciliation before harmony can happen.

Peace is what God is up to.

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When everything is right between God and people there is shalom.

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When everything is right between people and people there is shalom.

² Credit belongs to Bernhard Ott for these ideas from his book, *God's Shalom Project*.

If there is dissonance, or if things are out of harmony, there is no *shalom*. I think we all know that feeling very well when there is not peace between us and another person or between us and God. It's a terrible feeling of uneasiness, like something is just not right. There is dissonance, a lack of harmony.

Well, what God has been up to since the fall of man is to restore us back to that *shalom*. But, in order for that to happen there needs to be a reconciliation.

The word *shalom* is used 237 times in the Old Testament, but it doesn't show up until Genesis 15:15. The word is absent in the opening chapters of the Bible, but the concept is there. After each day of creation when God finished his work for the day, what did he say? "It is good." What does that mean? It means that there is harmony. It all works together. There is no dissonance. There is *shalom*.

After creating man and woman what did he say? "It is very good." This is a good thing. Here is my masterpiece, my crowning glory. There is no dissonance. Everything is right. There is *shalom*.

God created us for a very specific purpose and when we are not in line with that purpose there will be dissonance – a lack of harmony. *Shalom* will be lost. There can be no peace.

And as you know, the *shalom* in the garden in the beginning was lost when Adam and Eve first disobeyed God. The *Shalom* of God left them, and ever since that time God has been all about restoring the peace that once existed in Eden.

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Ephesians 2:10 (NLT)

¹⁰ For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.

We are God's masterpiece, created on purpose for purpose. God has very specific things for us to do. He has a very specific way in which we are to live and be, and when we are not living according to his purposes his *shalom* for us is impossible. There can be no peace.

There is *shalom* when we can look God in the eye, so to speak, and know that there is nothing between us. There is *shalom* when we can look at our fellow human being and say, "I am happy to see you. There is nothing between us."³

We're going to take a look at Ephesians 2 today. The Ephesian churches had a mixture of Gentile and Jewish Christians.

Although there is no real problem that is directly addressed in this letter, we know that by the time John wrote Revelation, about 35 years after Paul wrote the letter to the Ephesians, they had lost the love that they once had.

This is what Jesus said about the Ephesian church through John;

³ Bernhard Ott, *God's Shalom Project*, Good Books. Intercourse, PA ©2004. pg. 11

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Revelation 2:2–4 (NLT)

2 “I know all the things you do. I have seen your hard work and your patient endurance. I know you don’t tolerate evil people. You have examined the claims of those who say they are apostles but are not. You have discovered they are liars. 3 You have patiently suffered for me without quitting. 4 “But I have this complaint against you. You don’t love me or each other as you did at first!

So, they were very much about truth and making sure that false teaching didn’t get in. Truth was everything to them. Doctrinal purity was a buzz word for them. They put truth above relationships and it overshadowed grace and peace.

3 You have patiently suffered for me without quitting. 4 “But I have this complaint against you. You don’t love me or each other as you did at first!

They had a lot of things, but love was lost. And as Paul said in 1 Corinthians, if you don’t have love, you have nothing. In Paul’s letters he used the word ‘love’ *agapao* (verb), or *agape* (noun) 107 times. Nineteen of those were in Ephesians. That means that about 1/6th of his references to “love” occur in this small epistle.

He begins with love in 1:4, 6 and ends the letter with love in 6:23-24. It kind of makes you think that maybe Paul sensed that they needed to be careful that they didn’t lose the love they had. He actually commends them for their love for their fellow believers (1:15). So they started out well.

The churches in Ephesus were made up of both Jewish and Gentile Christians, which is quite an amazing miracle of God, because historically, Jews saw Gentiles as unclean. They looked down their noses on them. They despised them. The Jews saw themselves as the crème de la crème of God’s kingdom and the Gentiles as the scum of the earth. But, the cross of Christ brought *shalom* into their midst and broke down that barrier of hostility, and made the two one.

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Ephesians 2:10–22 (NLT)

10 For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago. 11 Don’t forget that you Gentiles used to be outsiders. You were called “uncircumcised heathens” by the Jews, who were proud of their circumcision, even though it affected only their bodies and not their hearts.

So, Paul is saying that the Jews used to make disparaging comments about the Gentiles by calling them “the uncircumcision.” The Jews thought of themselves as special because they were called by God. They forgot, though, that they were called by God to bring God’s *shalom* to all people, including the Gentiles.

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12 In those days you were living apart from Christ. You were excluded from citizenship among the people of Israel, and you did not know the covenant promises God had made to them. You lived in this world without God and without hope. 13 But now you have been

united with Christ Jesus. Once you were far away from God, but now you have been brought near to him through the blood of Christ.

So, before Christ, the Gentiles had no hope. They had no connection to the promised Messiah. But because of Christ's finished work on the cross, Paul says, they have been brought together.

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¹⁴ For Christ himself has brought peace to us. He united Jews and Gentiles into one people when, in his own body on the cross, he broke down the wall of hostility that separated us. ¹⁵ He did this by ending the system of law with its commandments and regulations. He made peace between Jews and Gentiles by creating in himself one new people from the two groups.

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¹⁶ Together as one body, Christ reconciled both groups to God by means of his death on the cross, and our hostility toward each other was put to death. ¹⁷ He brought this Good News of peace to you Gentiles who were far away from him, and peace to the Jews who were near. ¹⁸ Now all of us can come to the Father through the same Holy Spirit because of what Christ has done for us.

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¹⁹ So now you Gentiles are no longer strangers and foreigners. You are citizens along with all of God's holy people. You are members of God's family. ²⁰ Together, we are his house, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus himself. ²¹ We are carefully joined together in him, becoming a holy temple for the Lord. ²² Through him you Gentiles are also being made part of this dwelling where God lives by his Spirit.

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At the beginning of the message this morning I posed the question; **What is God up to?** Well, this passage tells us. He is all about reconciliation – reconciliation between us and him and reconciliation between us and other people. We can see the tension in this passage that there is in living between **“the already and the not yet.”**

All of the things that Paul addresses in verses 13-22 are past realities. They have already happened. That is the already.

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Christ **is** our peace. He **has brought** us near by his death on the cross. He **has made** us one with each other. He **has broken down** the dividing wall of hostility. He **made** one new person. He **brought** peace between the two. And because of all that, we **have access** to the Father through the Spirit.

These are all present realities because of realities that have already occurred in the past. And now Paul says, **“live like it.”**

He then uses the illustration of a building that symbolizes the church. He is not talking about a physical church building, or structure. He is talking about Christ's body. We who are disciples of Jesus are members of that building, or body. Paul is not addressing individuals here either. He is talking about the church, the community of believers.

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Peter used the same analogy in 1 Peter 2.

1 Peter 2:4-5 (NLT)

4 You are coming to Christ, who is the living cornerstone of God's temple. He was rejected by people, but he was chosen by God for great honor. 5 And you are living stones that God is building into his spiritual temple...

Paul, in some of his other letters uses that same theme.

We are all a part of the same spiritual building, or body, with Christ as the chief cornerstone, and ***we are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.***

What's God up to? He is gathering building materials for his spiritual house. We are like those living stones that he picks up, brushes off, chips away rough edges that cause dissonance, and then fits them into his house. And he does this without any differentiation. There are no classes in the society of Christ. This truth is evident all through Scripture.

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Here is just one example from **Galatians**. There are some people who accuse Paul of being a male chauvinist, but he is far from it. Look at what he said.

Galatians 3:27–28 (NLT)

27 And all who have been united with Christ in baptism have put on Christ, like putting on new clothes. 28 There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus.

There is to be no hierarchy in the church. There are to be no walls between race, or gender, or economic status, education, or any other artificial wall we like to erect. Why?

Because God's *shalom* has broken it down. The death and resurrection of Jesus, 2000 years ago, has broken down any wall of hostility that had previously existed. *Shalom has come!*

What is God up to? He is gathering building materials for his spiritual building from all walks of life, from every race, creed and colour, and regardless of gender. He is gathering a people who will be committed to what he is about.

We are to be peace bearers, ministers of reconciliation.

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2 Corinthians 5:16–20 (NLT)

16 So we have stopped evaluating others from a human point of view.

We don't look at each other the way the world does. We don't do things the way the world does. We go against the flow.

At one time we thought of Christ merely from a human point of view. How differently we know him now! 17 This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun! 18 And all of this is a gift from God,

who brought us back to himself through Christ. And God has given us this task of reconciling people to him.

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19 For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation. 20 So we are Christ's ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, "Come back to God!"

God reconciled us to himself through Christ, and he then turns around and says, now you are my ambassadors. Go do the same. Friends, if there is dissonance, or a lack of *shalom* in the church there will be no growth, numerically or spiritually.

Let me say that another way.

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God's power will be manifested in the church to the degree that we take seriously his call to be ministers of reconciliation or peace bearers.

God's plan for *shalom* does not come about automatically while we sit passively by and watch. He has called us to join him in his great peace plan. He is looking for people who are fully committed to what he is about.

Remember when Jesus was arrested and all the disciples abandoned him? He was subsequently crucified while they watched. Then they all went into hiding behind locked doors. They feared for their lives, and they hid in shame because they had all betrayed the trust of their rabbi. Do you remember what happened next?

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John 20:19–21 (NLT)

19 That Sunday evening the disciples were meeting behind locked doors because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders. Suddenly, Jesus was standing there among them! "Peace be with you," he said. 20 As he spoke, he showed them the wounds in his hands and his side. They were filled with joy when they saw the Lord! 21 Again he said, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you."

Peace be with you! There is nothing between us. Can you imagine how that must have made them feel after they had been feeling the weight of guilt and shame for betraying him? There is no debt. It has been paid. There is *shalom*. And then he said to them, "***As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.***" You are now to be *my* peace bearers.

Friends, God has called us at Campbell River Baptist Church to be at peace with each other, and to bring his peace to the world around us.

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God's power will be manifested in the church to the degree that we take seriously his call to be ministers of reconciliation or peace bearers.

Are you a peace bearer? Are you a minister of reconciliation? Have you done everything in your power to make peace with your brothers and sisters in Christ? Is there someone to whom you are unable to say, "I'm happy to see you, there is nothing between us"?

There should be no one in this gathering of believers that you cannot fellowship with. I love being a part of CRBC. I love seeing us work together in God's kingdom business.

I love seeing the power of Jesus transform lives. I love seeing his Spirit work in the hearts of people, including my own and changing our ways of thinking to his way. I love seeing what God is doing through our Outreach groups, and through our Growth Groups as we grapple with God's Word and allow him to change us. The fellowship is sweet. It is becoming so real.

And I would encourage you, if there are those with whom you cannot fellowship, make it right. Bring God's *shalom* into your relationships.

When we take our call seriously to be ministers of reconciliation, God will do amazing things in our midst. His *shalom* will fill this place. Others in the community will stand up and take notice. We will see God's power in ways that we could never imagine.

This is God's project and he is inviting each of us to be his coworkers.

We are going to celebrate communion together now. If you feel like you do not have peace with God through Jesus' death on the cross I would invite you to ask him to forgive you. He died to pay the penalty for your sins so you could be in relationship with the holy, loving, perfect heavenly Father who created everything for your good and for his glory.

If your relationship with God is not good, please make it right with him now through Jesus death that paid the penalty for your sins, and then join us in celebrating together. That is what this table is all about.

Benediction

2 Thessalonians 3:16

¹⁶ Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in every way. The Lord be with you all.